

# The Cadre's top 17 albums of 1997

## 1/ Radiohead *OK Computer!* (Capitol)

While the post-Nirvana age has relieved many pseudo-grunge bands from the mainstream circuit, Radiohead took chances and eliminated Bush-like formulas to become the premiere avant garde rock group success story of 1997. While their videos have caused controversy, *OK Computer!*'s songscapes call for nothing but praise. The mix of loud/soft is nothing new, but the minimalist magic that is produced with psychedelic precision is enhanced through electronic undertones that are controlled by the genius of Thom Yorke and crew. Radiohead's appeal relies on their ability to confuse, constantly making the listener guess what the next bar will produce. With "Paranoid android," the simple patience that characterizes their sound showcases the best of rock contrasts while the subtlety of "Let down" and "Karma police" takes a glimpse into the future with an Orwellian theme hiding in the shadows of the eleven track disc. The issues of the apocalyptic 90's is filtered through Yorke's lyricism which balances itself on the border of optimism and depression. "Electioneering" pokes fun at the stand-by comedy of politicians, while "Subterranean homesick blues" is entirely progressive and refreshing.

Without a doubt, Radiohead has the honour of The Cadre's Best Album of the Year of 1997; no other band has had the guts, the product and the success like this Oxford, England band.

## 2/ Sarah McLauchlan *Surfacing* (Nettwerk)

The power of Halifax's Sarah McLauchlan is evident in both her songs and her personal causes. If this were a list of the most innovative artists of the year, Ms. McLauchlan would be at the top, with her Lilith Fair contribution which, though long overdue, had become the best concert series in quite a while. Couple the success of the all-female tour with her new album *Surfacing* and we see that 1997 has been a very good year for Canada's brightest star. *Surfacing*, co-written and produced by Pierre Marchand, beautifully blends emotional lyricism with engaging song structures which include unique instrumentation and trip-hop-like beats. The loops and samples never take away from the songs themselves which is a credit to all involved in the album. However, the tip of the hat is reserved for McLauchlan who has produced the top Canadian album of the year.

## 3/ The Prodigy *The Fat of the Land* (Maverick/Warner Bros)

Lumping The Prodigy into a genre known as electronica is both unfair and unwarranted, as is the title of The Sex Pistols of Rave music. Put your biases aside along with your generalizations, *The Fat of the Land* combines the hardest rhythms with the most attitude since James Brown. These badboys are nothing more than innovative artists who have the unfortunate task of being the harbringers of accessible yet controversial dance music which may land them in the sell out category. Don't be mistaken. The Prodigy are no sell outs, they are just one of the best bands in this New World Order.

## 4/ Pavement *Brighten the Corners* (Matador/Capitol)

Despite being separated by geography, age, and talent, this quintet is easily the best American rock band to come along since...well...since...maybe ever. Their '97 release, *Brighten the Corners*, exhibited less innovation than previous albums but the most togetherness that the band has ever displayed. Singer Stephen Malkmus and guitarist Scott Kannberg are able to keep the flightiness of their past contained, allowing the energy to be filtered out in full power, and bringing Pavement's anti-anthems to the top of the heap in songwriting for this year. With humour still intact, tongue planted firmly in cheek, and trippy tendencies always evident, the maturity of Pavement is welcomed by fans -- new and old alike. Though their songcraft will never make them a mainstream success story they will go down in history as highly influential. Hey--Phish call Pavement the best band in the universe.

## 5/ Ani DiFranco *Living in Clip* (Ritcheous Babe)

The DIY bohemian riot girl from Buffalo, NY has a love for hip-hop jazz and all things rhythmic which contributes to her progressive assault of craftwomanship via the best live album of the year in *Living in Clip*. Ani DiFranco's double CD addition to the music scene of 97 was a much needed sign of inventiveness. The sugar sweet Jewel and the pouty princess Fiona Apple have both tried to duplicate DiFranco's style, yet Ani herself relies on the perfection of her music rather than video or radio play which let the Apple/Jewel duo to plague the airwaves. Ani DiFranco deserves the respect and the recognition that has long been overdue. *Living in Clip* may be able to pave the way for the two r's and might legitimize her own Ritcheous Babe label.

## 6/ Blur *Blur* (Virgin Records)

Maturity for rock musicians usually begins with lowering the volume metre, but not so with Blur. England's darlings dazzled American audiences with their smart, powerful, and minimalist '97 self-titled release. "Song 2" could be single of the year. Whoo-hoo.

## 7/ Ben Harper *The Will to Live* (Virgin Records)

This lo-fi roots reggae storm trooper offers a dynamic departure from his previously Dylanesque soundbytes. Now, Harper is what Jimmy Page would have been like if he were at the Newport Folk Festival in 1965 -- Harper is electric.

## 8/ Janet Jackson *The Velvet Rope* (Virgin Records)

Seventy seven minutes of stimulated intimacy with bass heavy trip-hop a la house dance style of the late 80's. Oh yeah, did I mention that this is Jackson's most daring release with politics, love and revolution all stressed within a matter of three barre chords. Outstanding!

## 9/ The Verve *Urban Hymns* (Virgin Records)

Holy smokes! The Verve has melody, rhythm and an innovative Britpop sound that actually may keep the UK genre alive. With hits like, "Sonnet," and "Bitter sweet symphony," The Verve are intelligent, soulful and most of all infectious with their engaging lyrics and musicianship. Richard Ashcroft had previously hinted at the band splitting up, obviously it encouraged the English group to write their best material ever.

## 10/ Ben Folds Five *Whatever and Ever Amen* (Sony)

This piano-driven trio from the mecca of alterpop, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, produced a compelling album that teaches the guitar minded grunge generation that you can all out rock with 88 keys.

## 11/ Tea Party *Transmission* (EMI)

Windsor, Ontario's Tea Party have become Montreal's most welcome addition since Expo 67. Indeed, the heavy electronica fused rock of this Canadian trio is progressive and energetic.

## 12/ KRS-One *I Got Next* (Jive)

Rap/hip-hop has been infected with the Puff Daddy family, but 1997 allowed the Professor of hiphopricy, KRS-One to showcase an intelligent and rhythm friendly album to the unsuspecting North American world.

## 13/ U2 *Pop* (Virgin Records)

The arsenal of sound effects, and tape manipulations were controlled by the Irish quartet with magnificent results. Much stronger than *Zooropa*, *Pop* brings *Achtung Baby* to another level and predicts the future of pop/rock music in a single disc.

## 14/ The Chemical Brothers *Dig Your Own Hole* (EMI)

More easily digestible than their countrymen, The Prodigy, The Chemical Brothers borrow from no peers and amazingly create a sound that is so fresh it belongs in the produce section.

## 15/ Erykah Badu *Baduizm* (Universal)

Reincarnated from Billie Holiday, Erykah has a soulfully erotic voice and the musical impressions to back it all up. From jazz to hip/hop, Badu is original and will be sticking around the R&B pop scene for a long time to come.

## 16/ Treble Charger *Maybe Its Me* (BMG/Vik)

The best of Canadian power pop, Treble Charger dodged the bullet of major label sell out status and had the advantage of creating an album with Lou Giordano of Husker Du/Sugar fame.

## 17/ Oasis *Be Here Now* (Epic/Sony)

There not innovative at all...but they DO write good songs -- albeit, borrowed from the best of the rock n roll past.